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Bringing Information to People

By Charles Benton

ON NOVEMBER 15, 1979, after more than two decades of dedicated effort on the part of librarians, trustees, and concerned citizens, the first White House Conference on Library and Information Services was convened in Washington, D.C. In the four and one-half days that followed, more than 3600 participants, including a total of 806 delegates and alternates, discussed and debated some of the most critical issues emerging in contemporary society. It was the largest White House Conference ever held at one location and the culmination of a nationwide effort involving more than 100,000 people, a fact that underlined the importance of the issues and the widespread interest in their resolution.

The timing of the conference was fortunate. Advances in computer and communications technologies were fast bringing about profound changes in the way the American people get and use information. A major concern was the future role of library and information services in our emerging Information Society.

The overall

theme of the White House Conference was "Bringing Information to People," and the Conference itself was structured around user needs. Five major theme areas were:

Library and Information Services for:

- Meeting Personal Needs
- Enhancing Lifelong Learning
- Improving Organizations and Professions
- Effectively Governing Society
- Increasing International Cooperation

The delegates passed 64 resolutions, 55 of which have since been acted on, in part or entirely. The credit and thanks for this achievement go, in large part, to the dedicated work of the state librarians, WHCLIST (The White House Conference on Library and Information Services Task Force), FOLUSA (Friends of Libraries, U.S.A.), all of the library and information professional and trade associations, NCLIS, and especially the ALA Washington Office. In short, the entire library/information community should be credited with the results.

Perhaps the single most important result so far of the White House Con-

ference was the passage of the 1984 amendments to the Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA). This piece of legislation, which responds to 2 resolutions, represents an extremely successful partnership among the federal and the state and local sectors. Typically, one federal dollar has been matched by \$20 at the state and local level. Innovative projects to provide library/information services to the least served users and to improve services for all are among the principal results of these prudently spent funds.

Other important outcomes of the White House Conference are the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science's programs—completed, ongoing, and planned. NCLIS has dedicated its efforts toward improving and expanding library/information services and continuing the White House Conference process as it plans for the 1989 event.

As the second Chairman of the Commission, I was also appointed to serve as Conference Chairman. I cannot think of a more demanding and exciting challenge than trying to guide so many people committed to meeting user needs—"bringing information to



Charles Benton is Commissioner and Former Chairman of the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science and the White House Conference on Library and Information Services. This is the first of three articles that describe the implementation of resolutions from the 1979 White House Conference on Library and Information Services

make the library the first place in the community to which people turn when seeking information and referral services. The library/information community needs to educate the citizenry and work toward achieving passage of appropriate legislative language and policy to show that CI&R is one answer to the human dilemma of not knowing where to turn for help. Some progress was made toward that end in the recent revisions of LSCA.

Lifelong learning

The U.S. Department of Education's *Nation at Risk* report, along with reports from several other groups, had noticeable omissions of the importance of library and information resources in lifelong learning. Under the leadership of Commissioner Gordon Ambach, then President-elect and now President of the Council of Chief State School Officers, NCLIS issued a statement noting this omission and recommending the strengthening of elementary and secondary school library media ser-

vices for teaching skills of finding and using information effectively. Subsequently, the Department of Education published *Alliance for Excellence: Librarians Respond to "A Nation at Risk."*

tions on this theme (A1, A2, A11) are addressed in a major new NCLIS initiative for FY 1986, to help promote and strengthen local libraries as the information resource center for local governments. NCLIS has also been concerned about the most effective dissemination of government information, especially in connection with its public/private sector task force. Each of these projects supports one or more theme areas and/or resolutions of the White House Conference. And certainly, the Commission's four major program areas—Access to Information; Improving Library and Information Services to Meet Changing Needs; Information Technology and Productivity; and, Policy, Planning, and Advice—are all supportive of White House Conference resolutions.

International activities

The White House Conference addressed international library and information problems in resolutions C1, E1, and E2. The Commission has initiated a

tions Task Force is a major contribution to the debate over the appropriate roles of the public and private sectors in providing information. The seven principles of this report have been repeatedly cited as the basis of decisions and policy recommendations by numerous groups and individuals. Two major federal agencies, the Office of Management and Budget and the Congressional Joint Committee on Printing, have publicly discussed federal information policy which generated a broad range of responses. But central to practically everyone's concerns is an appropriate relationship between the two sectors in information provision.

Technology & productivity

Perhaps the most compelling topic in the library/information arena is the role of technology in access to information. It was addressed in White House Conference resolutions C4 and C10. The ALA Commission on Freedom and Equality of Access to Information draft report is primarily concerned with this issue. NCLIS was asked to assist the White House Conference on Productivity and helped place emphasis in the conference on the importance of information resources management. NCLIS has published one article, "U.S. Population Characteristics: Implications for Libraries," *Wilson Library Bulletin*, September 1984, and will publish two more this year concerning information technology and productivity. We fully recognize that information technology is a driving force that critically affects meeting user needs for library/information services.

Statistics and fees

White House Conference resolutions A3 and A11 dealt with statistics and fees.

Library Statistics: Libraries have always lacked good statistical data for planning and other purposes. NCLIS is working closely with the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) to facilitate publication of timely and informative surveys for the library and information community. The Chief Officers of State Library Agencies (COSLA) has been especially helpful in encouraging state librarians to provide the needed data to NCES.

The Role of Fees in Supporting Library and Information Services in Public and Academic Libraries: Again the Commission is tackling a "hot" topic. During the discussion of three of the recommendations from *Library and Information Services to Cultural Minorities* related to fees, the Commission raised questions concerning the extent to which fees are charged and for what services. Surprisingly, information to answer those questions was not readily available. With the financial assistance

“In collaboration with the Army Human Engineering Laboratory of the Department of Defense, NCLIS has established two demonstration sites to determine whether computer technology . . . to instruct military recruits . . . can be used in volunteer literacy programs based in public libraries”

Organizations & professions

The Role of the Special Library in Networks and Cooperatives was addressed on White House Conference resolutions C1, C2, and C13. The NCLIS/Special Libraries Association Task Force produced a report that revealed that special librarians were more active network participants than had been thought. A major barrier to the participation of special libraries in OCLC, that of having to contribute all their cataloging records to the public database, was removed during the course of the study. There is still work to be done to remove constraints from corporate library resource sharing.

Information for governance

White House conference resolu-

number of projects to insure active involvement of the United States in international library/information programs. Perhaps the most important, and surely the most sensitive project, concerned the future of the U.S. involvement in UNESCO. Recognizing the need to be prepared to continue certain international relationships should the United States withdraw from UNESCO, the State Department requested NCLIS to prepare alternative mechanisms to further international programs. Working with the U.S. National Committee for UNESCO/PGI, NCLIS developed a document proposing alternatives and indicating where no alternatives exist. The Commission will continue to work with the State Department to expand U.S. participation in international library/information archival programs.

Public/private sector interaction

Responding to White House Conference resolutions C1 and C4, the discussion document resulting from the work of the Public/Private Sector Rela-

people"—to new levels of commitment. I became so involved in what I call the "White House Conference Process"—constant reassessment of and new efforts toward meeting user needs—that I accepted a second term as Chairman of the Commission. I agreed to a second term in order to work on implementing as many of the White House Conference Resolutions as possible, and especially to help Congress revise and improve the Library Services and Construction Act. Having a terrific conference is one thing; achieving legislative implementation is quite another. I am proud of the Commission's accomplishments toward reaching that goal during my Chairmanship and also during that of Elinor Hashim, my successor.

NCLIS leadership role

NCLIS has accomplished or is currently working toward the accomplishment of programs related to almost half of the 64 White House Conference Resolutions. Although only four resolutions mention the Commission by name, we have taken responsibility for monitoring and encouraging federal agency implementation of appropriate resolutions, we have worked diligently with the Congress to help draft and enact needed legislation, and we have worked in many other areas that are responsive to the needs expressed at the White House Conference.

Our progress on the four resolutions directed to NCLIS may be summarized as follows: Two resolutions (F1 & F5 at the Conference) asked NCLIS to create WHCLIST and to assist that citizen group to implement the White House Conference resolutions. They are done and ongoing. Neither President Carter nor President Reagan has appointed a youth to the Commission to date, as a third resolution (F2) directed at NCLIS recommended. Resolution (F6), the fourth directed at NCLIS, asked the Commission to establish a task force on national information policy. Studying and making recommendations for national information policies is of primary concern to the Commission and has been one of the Commission's top priorities for fiscal years 1985 and 1986.

Eleven federal agencies are working toward the accomplishments of another 18 White House Conference resolutions. Two major achievements are the development and acceptance of the national library symbol and the Library of Congress' mass deacidification and optical disk storage preservation projects. The Commission's work with Congress is discussed in the next section.

In its own program activities, the Commission continues to work toward implementing the White House Conference resolutions. The following brief

project summaries illustrate some NCLIS efforts and accomplishments. The first five areas follow roughly the five major themes of the 1979 White House Conference.

Needs of the underserved

Among the White House Conference Resolutions relating to this theme and impacted by NCLIS programs are A1, A3, A4, A5, A6, A10, B2, B10, C5, D2, D4.

Library and Information Services to Cultural Minorities: NCLIS published the report of its Task Force on Library and Information Services to Cultural Minorities in 1983—carrying on with unfinished work from the White House Conference. There is much to be done here, the most important of which is for the Commission and the library/information community to join forces to carry out the report's recommendations. American Library Association President E.J. Josey (who also chaired this task force) has already started the

Chairman Bessie Moore has been singularly effective at raising the consciousness levels of the Commission to respond to that part of our mandate. A major NCLIS priority is to continue our increasingly successful efforts to link service providers to the elderly with the library and information service providers and to convince this country's older adults that libraries can fill the special information needs of the aging.

The National Rural Library/Information Services Development Program: During the past four years the Commission has devoted significant effort to the development of an active rural program, the purpose of which is to address the special informational needs of rural America. On July 21, 1982, a "Joint Congressional Hearing on the Changing Information Needs of Rural America: the Role of Libraries and Information Technology" was held, coordinated through Commission efforts. The Hearing, cochaired by Senator Mark Andrews (R-North Dakota) and

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process of determining what action ALA should take.

Adult Literacy: Latest estimates indicate that 27 million American adults are functionally illiterate. This critical national problem has been a personal concern for many years. The Commission is a member of the Executive Committee of ALA's Coalition for Literacy which has launched a nationwide campaign to promote volunteer literacy programs in libraries. In collaboration with the Army Human Engineering Laboratory of the Department of Defense, NCLIS has established two demonstration sites to determine whether computer technology designed to instruct military recruits who lack basic reading skills can be used in volunteer literacy programs based in public libraries. We have also worked with Mrs. George Bush in this area.

Library and Information Services for Older Adults: The Commission's mandate (Public Law 91-345) specifies that we must be concerned about the provision of library and information services to the nation's elderly. Vice

Representative George E. Brown, Jr. (D-California), focused Congressional and public attention, perhaps for the first time, on the information needs of the nation's rural areas and the importance of doing something to meet these needs. The Hearing's report has been copublished by the Commission and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Commissioner Margaret Warden of Montana has been the chief champion of rural library services on the Commission. Within the next several months, the U.S. Department of Agriculture will probably establish a National Advisory Board on Rural Information Needs, thus creating a locus of interests and concern within a major agency for library and information services to rural citizens.

Community Information and Referral Services (CI&R): Under the leadership of Commissioner Clara Jones, who had initiated the first major CI&R program in a large public library (Detroit), NCLIS published the report of its CI&R Task Force in 1983. This report showed how much can be done to

of the Council on Library Resources, NCLIS has completed a study on the role of fees in supporting library and information services in public and academic libraries.

Relationship with WHCLIST

While NCLIS may be the primary implementor of the White House Conference resolutions at the national level, it is the remarkable White House Conference on Library and Information Services Taskforce (WHCLIST) that is the driving force behind the many improvements in library/information services throughout the states. White House Conference resolutions F1, F3, and F5 addressed the relationship of NCLIS and WHCLIST. I feel privileged to have worked with this dedicated group of people who have accomplished so much. The Commission is proud to have helped them promote the adoption of the national library symbol, especially as an information sign on federal, state, and local highways.

LSCA as amended

Over the past few years, the Commission has provided technical assistance to the Congress on the reauthorization of the Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA) by gathering information from members of the library/information community regarding their needs and ideas for the new legislation. NCLIS assisted the House Subcommittee on Postsecondary Education with a series of hearings held across the country, during which more than 200 witnesses testified on the needs of libraries for federal assistance and encouragement through LSCA. The Commission also assisted the Senate Subcommittee on Education, Arts, and Humanities with their hearings.

The new law, which includes a number of specifications recommended by the Commission, adds increased emphasis to serving the elderly, provides further encouragement for resource sharing among different types of libraries, authorizes funding directly to Indian tribes in a new Title IV, adds a new Title V for funding of foreign language materials, and authorizes funding of library literacy programs in a new Title VI.

As the Commission worked with Congress on the reauthorization of LSCA, we urged that the recommendations of the White House Conference be included in the law. I am pleased to report that 22 (A3-6, A10-12; B2, 3, 9, 10; C2, 5, 7, 13, 15, 18; D1-4; E4) of the 64 resolutions are at least partially addressed by the new LSCA. There are ten major concepts that NCLIS pushed to have included in the law. I list them in four categories.

I. Funding:

1) The funding level of LSCA will be set one year in advance of the appropriation. This provision allows grantees sufficient time for good program planning.

2) States may reduce their funding of institutional library services as federal funds decrease. Many states have reduced the number of institutionalized individuals yet still had to provide the same level of library services in order to receive funds under LSCA.

3) LSCA funds may be used for renovation, as well as construction, such as to provide appropriate technological systems in libraries. Libraries need to keep up with rapidly changing information technologies.

4) Libraries participating in resource sharing activities may be reimbursed for their expenses in loaning materials to public libraries.

II. State Services:

5) State programs are to be directed toward eventual compliance with a new statewide resource sharing plan.

and allows funding which it did not have under Title IV.

10) A new Title VI provides funds for library literacy programs.

Although there are no barriers in the current LSCA to using new technology to enhance library services, everything possible should be done to encourage libraries to take advantage of the most appropriate technologies for meeting user needs. My major disappointment with the amendments to LSCA is that the necessary marriage of new technologies with library and information services is not emphasized as much as I felt it could be. NCLIS had hoped that the Congress would accept a new name for the legislation—The Library Services and Technology Act.

The WHC process

Whatever progress we have made over the past five years in "bringing information to people" in no way diminishes the compelling need for a con-

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6) States have more discretion in determining the most critical library and information needs of their residents and how they may best be served through the use of LSCA funds.

III. Resource Sharing:

7) The concept of resource sharing has been added to interlibrary cooperation. The focus is now more on meeting user needs than institutional needs.

IV. Special Constituencies and Programs:

8) A new Title IV, Library Services to Indian Tribes, recognizes that most Indian tribes have received little or no LSCA funding. Practically all of the concepts in the National Indian Omnibus Library Bill, White House Conference Resolution D2, are included here.

9) The former Title IV, Older Readers Services, is fully incorporated in Title I, Library Services. Moving Older Readers Services to Title I puts greater emphasis on meeting the library and information needs of the elderly

tinuing "needs assessment process." The White House Conference process at its best leads to the recommending of public policy and programs through a systematic assessment of public needs. It is truly the democratic process at work.

How much we have accomplished in just five years! And how wise the delegates were to create their own follow-up mechanism—WHCLIST. Together we see significant progress toward the implementation of most of the 64 resolutions. Now, we must look ahead. What is the next milestone in our continuous needs assessment process? A 1989 conference is an obvious answer. WHCLIST and NCLIS have already started planning for this event. I cannot say what the structure or content of the next conference will be, but I am sure its focal point will again be how better to meet the library/information service needs of users . . . in short, how to bring information and knowledge to people.